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RESILIENCE AND THE NORMATIVE DIMENSION OF PSYCHOLOGY

Abstract

The mainstream approach to the normative issues adopted by a contemporary psychological science can be arguably accounted for in terms of the psychologists' commitment to the fact–value distinction as the idea of two separate spheres: the factual and the normative, only one of which (the factual) is a legitimate area of scientific interest. When applied to the notion of resilience conceived, following Suniya S. Luthar, as derivable from the concepts of positive adaptation and adversity, such a perspective would be reflected in an attempt to develop a normatively neutral and fully descriptive conceptualization of the phenomenon in question. A recent criticism of the fact-value distinction, however, together with discussions of so called thick concepts as expressing "a union of fact and value" may put the viablity of such a project into question and suggest the application of some more normatively-directed approaches.

Keywords: resilience, fact-value distinction, Hume, thick concepts

Sprężystość psychiczna a normatywny wymiar psychologii
Streszczenie

Domyślne podejście do kwestii normatywnych właściwe współczesnej psychologii w sposób klarowny odzwierciedlone jest w przywiązaniu psychologów do dystynkcji fakt–wartość jako przekonania o istnieniu dwóch oddzielnych sfer – tego, co faktyczne, i tego, co normatywne – z których tylko jedna (to, co faktyczne) może być właściwym przedmiotem naukowego zainteresowania. W odniesieniu do pojęcia sprężystości psychicznej, rozumianego za Suniyą S. Luthar jako oparte na pojęciach pozytywnej adaptacji oraz przeciwności (*adversity*), taka standardowa perspektywa znajduje swój wyraz w idei normatywnie neutralnej i w pełni deskryptywnej konceptualizacji tego obszaru badań. Niedawna krytyka dystynkcji fakt–wartość, a zwłaszcza analiza tak zwanych *thick concepts* jako wyrażających „jedność [*a union*] faktu i wartości", podaje wykonalność takiego projektu w wątpliwość i sugeruje odwołanie się do innych, bardziej ukierunkowanych na normatywność perspektyw.

Słowa kluczowe: sprężystość psychiczna, dystynkcja fakt–wartość, Hume, thick concepts

Science is "based on the facts … claims about the world that can be directly established by a careful, unprejudiced use of the senses … based on what we can see, hear and touch rather than on personal opinions or speculative imaginings." It is an observation "carried out in a careful, unprejudiced way," which is its "secure, objective basis." The above-given account is not only, as remarked by Chalmers (1999, p. 1), reflected in a commonsense view of science and all too familiar to anybody acquainted with philosophy of science, but also, importantly, easily recognizable to the psychologist working within the institutional structures of contemporary academia.

An important point to make is that such an account is usually conceived as both descriptive and normative. It is a part of the scientific psychology's creed, in particular, to avoid any "personal opinions or speculative imaginings," any prejudices and biases that may limit access to allegedly directly accessible empirical facts. Such an approach is usually connected with a clear separation between the domains of facts and values, expressed especially in terms of so called fact-value distinction. The aim of this chapter is to investigate psychology's commitment to the latter dichotomy with a special attention paid to recent investigations of psychological resilience.

(1) At first, the distinction itself will be discussed both in the context of its philosophical roots and its contemporary psychological formulation. (2) Then, in turn, the notion of resilience and the issue of its purely factual (i.e. normatively neutral) specification will come to the fore. The possibility of such specification, in particular, will be questioned due to some non-trivial similarities between the concept scrutinized and so called thick concepts which are commonly held as expressing "a union of fact and value" (Williams, 1985/2006, p. 129). (3) Finally, then, some conclusions will be drawn and the possibilities of psychological science more explicitly engaged with normative issues discussed.

The fact-value distinction (Elgin, 2013; cf. Dodd, Stern-Gillet, 1995) is usually derived from the work of the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1739/2014) who, in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, noticed that every "system of morality" contains two spheres of discourse: the one build around the verb *is* and the one structured by the verb *ought*. He emphasized, furthermore, that any move from the former to the latter, as "sudden" and "imperceptible" as it happens to be, should be "observed and explained." A reason, in particular, should be given "for what seems altogether inconceivable," i.e. for how a normative proposition of any kind (*ought*-proposition) can be deductively implied by any number of factual claims (*is*-propositions)."

Even though the general meaning of relatively concise Hume's remarks are sometimes subjected to scholarly dispute, especially when his whole system of morality is taken into account, they are usually conceived as introducing a strict and universal logical distinction between the descriptive (*is*) and the normative (*ought*) discursive domains. And, especially, they are regarded as implying "the claim that no valid argument can move from entirely factual premises to any

moral or evaluative conclusion" (MacIntyre 1981/2007, p. 56). According to this common reading, for instance, any description of a murder, irrespectively of its comprehensiveness, cannot imply that something bad happened.

The above-mentioned Hume's remarks turned out to be of an enormous importance. And, significantly, it was not only due to their overall influence on the Anglophone philosophy including the default 20th century philosophical stance: the one of logical positivism. They turned out to be so influential also because of the fact that they reflected the *Zeitgeist* of the modern era with all social and cultural changes following industrialization and technical innovation. The *Zeitgeist* of the era that, according to Max Weber (1971), marked a transition from the traditional societies of people inhabiting "a great enchanted garden" to modern ones condemned to *a disenchanted world* deprived of any value and meaning. After all, as a hostess quoted by Putnam (1982, p. 3, emphasis removed) has admitted, our science has taught us all too well that "the universe is an uncaring machine."

And it was exactly in such a context of classically positivistic worldview in which the 19th century psychology embarked upon a project of becoming a scientific discipline. No wonder, then, that it enthusiastically accepted the fact-value distinction regarded as one of the founding stones of anything deserving to be called science. It was nothing else than the psychologists' commitment to the dichotomy that was presumed by all devotion to dispassionate study of empirical facts and the abandonment of all aspirations "to be like priests" (Charland, 2008, p. 16).

Such a commitment, interestingly, usually was as firm as it remained unexpressed (let alone subjected to explicit discussion). And so it remains today. An important exception to this general rule can be found in two recent papers by Howard H. Kendler (1999, 2002) who defends a position of *proscientific naturalism*[1] and, especially, rejects "the idea that psychology is capable of identifying moral truths" (Kendler, 2002, p. 490). Such a rejection is regarded by Kendler as having a twofold justification. The first one refers to "the psychological inevitability of *moral pluralism*" (p. 490, emphasis added), to the fact that "human cognitive ability is so flexible and creative that every conceivable moral principle generates opposition and counter principles" (p. 491). The pluralism in question, even though called "moral," is a very broad phenomenon referring not only to its nominal domain but also to the claims of religion, law, and aesthetics. It is only natural science that makes the application

[1] Apart from his "hardline natural science approach" Kendler (p. 492) discusses "the softer humanistic naturalism" and specifies the relationship between these competing views of psychology as the one between *disenchanted science* and *enchanted science* (Harrington, 1996), respectively. The latter, significantly, rejects the fact-value distinction and regards psychology as somehow capable of identifying moral goodness and normatively appropriate social policies. As such, furthermore, it seems to constitute a relatively permanent thread in the history of psychology including not only such benign currents as Gestalt and humanistic psychologies, but also much more questionable projects like the ones supporting militarism or totalitarian policy (see Wundt's embrace of the German's engagement into the I World War made as a statement of fact; cf. Kendler, 1999). And it is exactly such a "flexibility," according to Kendler, which not only is easily explainable in terms of the lack of logical connection between the facts and the values, but which also should make one especially cautious.

of the monistic conception of truth justifiable thanks to the possibility of referring to the scientific "final authority" (p. 492) of empirical evidence.

The second source of Kendler's position is a metaethical stance, which he identifies with the fact-value distinction, the is-ought dichotomy, or the precaution against so called naturalistic fallacy (the practice of using these three terms interchangeably is, by itself, questionable, cf. especially Dodd, Stern-Gillet, 1995). What he is especially careful to reject is "the possibility of deducing ethical statements from non-ethical statements" or the one of "logically deriving what *ought* to be from what *is*" (Kendler, 2002, p. 490). In more particular terms, and in regard to psychology, it comes down to the dictum that psychology, by itself, "is incapable of converting empirical relationships into moral principles or social policies" (Kendler, 2002, p. 491).

An example provided by Kendler concerns a hypothetical empirical result that bilingual education results in poorer scholastic performance than its English-only counterpart. By itself, importantly, such an outcome falls short of the prescription to choose one particular educational policy over another. The adjudication between the values of academic achievement and those of ethnic identity still needs to be made and it cannot be determined by any amount of empirical evidence.

It does not mean, importantly, that psychological research is completely irrelevant for the issues democratic society and policy makers face. Rather, Kendler's (p. 490) emphasis that empirical facts cannot directly determine any normative position is, cautiously, followed by the claim that they "can be helpful in designing social policies." He affirmatively quotes Passmore's (1953, p. 675) saying that "policy is determined in the light of facts, but is not deduced from them" and elaborates that the contribution of psychology can be made through the estimation of the impact different political choices will probably have. Rather than to determine the normative status of the options available, in brief, psychology is able to make the choice between them informed and relatively confident about the consequences ensuing.

As soon as the mainstream psychology's approach to normative issues has been briefly summarized as a commitment to the fact-value distinction, it becomes possible to apply the above remarks to the notion of resilience. Before doing that, however, it may be worthwhile to explicitly specify some important features the latter concept shares with other well-established notions such as health, disease, development, or adaptation. When discussing the conceptual structure of disease, to begin with, Murphy (2008) has noticed that it is twofold and consists of an empirical and a normative aspects. When we say that a person in question suffers disease, more particularly, we not only make (1) a factual claim concerning that person's physiology and anatomy, but also (2) a normative judgment about the state of affairs being something negative, something which merits a clinical attention and, ideally, efficient therapy. And even though the particularities of the relationship between the empirical and the normative dimensions of the disease concept have been subjected to a considerable debate, their very presence remains evident to any conceptually attentive researcher.

Keeping this in mind it may be helpful to clarify the way in which such a dual structure is usually approached by the mainstream psychology. In the spirit of the fact-value distinction, in particular, it is presumed that the factual and the normative can be easily separated from each other and, furthermore, that the psychologist not only can, but actually should confine his/her scientific interests to the former. The normative aspect can indeed be informed by the factual evidence, but as such it is better left to policy makers. An alternative way in which such an understanding of the psychological project can be illustrated is by providing two potentially illuminating analogies. The first one is a laptop seller who being fully aware of the fact that people have different preferences concerning computer equipment's configuration can safely ignore this fact in his/her daily work. All he/she needs to do is to ask a client whether, for example, it is a faster processor or more capacious hard drive that is preferable. The psychologist, respectively, would be understood as providing factual evidence concerning the correlates and mechanisms of, say, health and subjective well-being, but leaving it to non-psychological authorities to decide which outcome is to be chosen should they come in conflict (e.g. an unhealthy but very tasty food).

The second analogy which may be provided is a botanist who, again, does not need to care about some people preferring oak trees rather than beeches. What is significant about this case is the fact that the botanist in question can not only, like a laptop seller, conduct his/her duties without any consideration with normative issues, but also possesses an explicit, formal, and fully descriptive procedure of identifying members of particular species. He/she, more specifically, does not need to take any normative stance about the supposed advantage the oak trees have over beeches in order to identify them. All that is required is to search through a tree guide and find an entry about a particular species: an entry which consists of the information and graphical illustration of the features a member of the latter possesses (e.g. leaves and a bark of a particular kind) and, thus, which provides a method of identifying a specific plant as an oak tree (or non-oak tree) on the basis of purely descriptive properties. Can such an approach succeed if applied to the phenomena we call resilience?

A first problem encountered when addressing this issue is a considerable vagueness of the meaning which is to be assigned to the notion of resilience (for some attempts at clarification of the issue see Olsson et al., 2003; Richardson, 2002; Strunz, 2012; Windle, 2010). In fact, one can hardly resist reminding a famous remark by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953/1999, p. 232) that "in psychology there are experimental methods and *conceptual confusion*," while studying the psychological literature on this topic. For the purposes of this chapter, however, the above-mentioned problem is not as pressing as it certainly is in some another contexts. And it is for two reasons. At first, in particular, a heavily discussed issue about whether resilience should be conceived as a trait, a process, or an outcome (Fletcher, Sarkar, 2013, p. 13) can be circumvented here. More particularly, even though it is a processual definition that will be scrutinized in what follows, the arguments offered may be easily restated in trait-related or outcome-related terms.

The second reason for which the conceptual confusion over the notion of resilience is not particularly detrimental to the present analyzes is the fact that there are conceptually attentive and formally strict attempts at the definition of resilience. Apart from the aforementioned efforts it is certainly a definition developed by Suniya S. Luthar (Luthar, 2006; Lutthar, Cicchetti, 2000; cf. Fletcher, Sarkar, 2013) which deserves attention both by itself and in the context of the question posed above.

As for the latter, the significance of Luthar's conceptualization lies in the seriousness and thoroughness of the attempt made to provide an operational definition of resilience, which, for the purposes of this paper, can be conceived as a counterpart of the above-mentioned descriptive criteria from the botanist's tree guide. The definition developed by Luthar, importantly, is *not* as avowedly normative as some other specifications available, like the one identifying resilience with a „*normal* development under difficult conditions" (Fonagy et al., 1991, p. 233, emphasis added) or „a pattern of effective performance in the environment, *evaluated* from the perspective of *salient developmental tasks* in the context of the late twentieth-century US society" (Masten et al., 1995, p. 1636, emphases added). As such, it poses a serious challenge to any doubts concerning the prospects of applying the fact-value distinction to resilience research.

One important aspect of the conceptual confusion about the proper meaning of resilience notion is the fact that various features happened to be indicated as defining attributes of the term in question. And it was a very significant contribution by Luthar and colleagues to notice that, irrespectively of all such ambiguity, most specifications are build around two "pivotal constructs" (Luthar, Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858) of adversity and positive adaptation. In other words, both exposure to the former and manifestation of the latter must be certified in order to demonstrate that the notion of resilience can be appropriately applied. Resilience, in consequence, is most usefully specified as "a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma" (Luthar, Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858).[2]

While establishing such a definition Luthar and colleagues not only explicitly express a two-dimensional nature of the notion in question, but also emphasize that each of the "pivotal constructs (…) have specific operational definitions" (Luthar, Cichetti, 2000, p. 858). *Adversity* (or *risk*), to begin with, can range from daily hassles to major life events and is conceived as encompassing all "negative life circumstances that are known to be statistically associated with adjustment difficulties" (Luthar, Cichetti, 2000, p. 858; cf. Luthar, 2006, p. 742). Exposure to community violence and maternal depression, for instance, both qualify due to their statistically significant relationship with maladjustment and one's own depressive symptoms respectively (Luthar, 2006).

[2] Windle (2010, p. 12, emphasis added) offers an alternative, three-factorial conceptualization of resilience as including not only adversity or risk and positive adaptation, but also a separately conceived feature of "the presence of *assets* or *resources* to offset the effects of the adversity."

Positive adaptation, in turn, has been defined by Luthar (2006, p. 742) as "adaptation that is substantially better than what would be expected given exposure to the risk circumstance being studied." Substantially "better than would be expected," importantly, is once again understood in terms of statistical probabilities and may refer to either "behaviorally manifested social competence, or success at meeting stage-salient developmental tasks" (Luthar, 2006, p. 742; cf. Luthar, Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858).

Coming back to the initial question it should be noted that the value-laden connotations associated not only with the resilience concept but also with the constructs employed to define it have not been eradicated by the operational efforts of Luthar's team. Resilience, adversity, and positive adaptation, even when defined in strict technical terms, are still clearly normative entities entailing positive (resilience, positive adaptation) or negative (adversity) evaluation. At the same time, however, it must be emphasized that the removal of normativity had never been the purpose, in the first place.[3] The normative character of the resilience concept by itself is as benign for the psychologist as the fact that faster processors are usually preferable was to the work of the aforementioned laptop seller. All that is included in the requirements of any genuinely scientific endeavor is an ability to clearly separate facts from values and to deal with the former only. Can it be done with resilience?

The Luthar and colleagues' attempts to provide an operational definition of resilience are interestingly parallel to the efforts made by Christopher Boorse (1975, 1977) on his route to define the notion of health. Both Luthar and the philosopher of medicine in question, were well aware that they are dealing with inevitably normative concepts. At the same time, they did not consider it a problem as soon as an objective way of descriptive identification of resilience and health, respectively, could be found. Both of these authors, furthermore, referred to statistical framework in order to achieve such an aim and in both cases, one needs to admit, it has yielded a considerable theoretical achievement.

Leaving Boorse aside (for a critical analysis one can refer to Cooper, 2002) and coming back to the Luthar's definition one needs to ask whether it provides a fully non-normative way of identifying resilience or, in other words, an exact equivalent of an entry in the botanist's tree guide. The very fact that we are equipped with empirical measurement techniques, which, in principle, could be applied by a normatively-blind computer, is by itself hardly sufficient to settle the issue. And it is for the reason that some non-trivial choices are still involved in the identification procedure and one can argue that these choices cannot be competently made without taking any normative stance.

[3] After all, if somebody "succeeded" at defining the notion of resilience in such a way that we could meaningfully doubt about whether it refers to something preferable, we could justifiably say that rather than having defined what we usually mean by resilience, a completely new concept has been introduced, which is only nominally familiar.

The choices in question can be found especially at the point when the transition from the general resilience definition to a particular measurement method is made. In order to measure adversity, to begin with, one does need to establish a statistically significant connection with maladjustment (cf. above). And even if, for example, we generally agree that depression is an undesirable state of affairs, it does not make such a consensus non-normative (could any amount of empirical evidence convince somebody who believes that pain and despair are preferable to think otherwise?). Also, furthermore, we do differ about how serious a problem depressive symptoms pose and about the status of phenomena symptomatically very close to, if not identical with, depression. We would differ, for instance, in our opinions about the spiritual regime which systematically leads to the experience of enlightenment at the cost of previous depression (the mystical dark night of the soul) and about the maximum period of time a person "could" mourn without earning a psychiatric diagnosis. All these differences are clearly normative and our stance on them is reflected in the set of phenomena we recognize as adjustment difficulties.

An analogous issue can be identified with regard to positive adaptation. The crucial point to be made here is that its indicators need to be "developmentally appropriate" (Luthar, 2006, p. 742) and "conceptually most relevant to the risk encountered" (Luthar, Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858). What is meant by the first of these formulas is an appropriateness "in terms of the domain assessed and the stringency of criteria used" (Luthar, 2006, p. 742). Could such features be reliably established independently of any normative perspective? Among children, for example, positive adaptation is often operationalized as either the presence of secure attachment (young children) or good social and academic functioning at school (older children). In some other situations, which we recognize as more serious, it can be considered more preferable to refer to "the mere absence of emotional or behavioral maladjustment" (Luthar, Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858).[4] Are such choices really determined by empirical evidence we have gathered or, rather, they just reflect default evaluative perspectives of the modern Western societies?[5]

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[4] Actually, one can even think about some terrible circumstances, in which the lack of what we usually associate with psychopathology could hardly be a mark of optimal functioning. Cf. a hypothetical example of an American soldier entering the Nazi death camp and not experiencing any negative emotions discussed by Nussbaum (1996, p. 403).

[5] Ungar and Liebenberg (2011, p. 126; cf. Ungar, 2008) have rightly noticed that resilience studies have usually been based on the samples taken from the Western or Developed World (the term they prefer is the "Minority World") with normal development and functioning understood, respectively, mainly in terms of individual school performance, attachment to a parent or caregiver (and, later, a partner), peer group socialization and the lack of delinquency. Such a conceptualization, obviously, is far from being culturally and historically universal. Cf. Luthar's (2006, p. 743, emphases added) insightful remark that in some situations it may be more appropriate to understood competence "in terms of 'better than expected' functioning of *families* or *communities* rather than of the children themselves… [and, KB] more logical to operationalize positive adjustment in terms of *the mother-child dyad* or *family unit.*"

The importance of the above considerations lies in the fact that they cast considerable doubts on the applicability of the strict fact-value distinction to the research on resilience and, more specifically, on the possibility of developing a fully descriptive, non-normative specification of this research's subject matter. Even if we are equipped, as needs to be reminded, with empirical instruments to measure resilience, a careful conceptual investigation of these techniques is still to be conducted.

One of the strategic choices one will certainly face is the one between operationalizm and operationalization. *Operationalizm* (Bridgman, 1927), to begin with, as a stance which defines the meaning of a concept in terms of the method of measuring it, would make it a self-evident truth that our measurement techniques are appropriate. In fact, by the very definition of resilience as the phenomenon measured by resilience questionnaires, they would be just ideal. The advantage of having a self-evident and, in fact, trivial solution to the initial problem would not, however, come at no extra cost. After having chosen operationalizm, in particular, one would need to deal with the fact that there are as many resilience notions as we have measurement techniques (even two versions of the same test would yield two separate concepts) and it would become hardly understandable why we are prone to think that they all measure the same phenomenon (even if they measure it differently). Not many psychologists, as it seems, would be ready to pay such a high price.

No wonder, then, that it is a more modest position of the need for *operationalizing* our notions (without identifying such operationalizations with the meanings of the concepts themselves) which is a default one in academic psychology. With such a position being taken it does make a good sense to say that our empirical definitions of resilience can be evaluated against the meaning we usually assign to the notion in question or, in other words, that they may be assessed on the dimension of their validity. Such an evaluation, furthermore, can be done on two, relatively separate, levels. Either particular measurement techniques can be chosen and subjected to scrutiny, or a general level investigation can be conducted with the aim of identifying some issues of broader importance. In order to maintain a formal consistence with the above remarks it is the latter route which will be taken in what follows.

The brief analysis of the definition of resilience in terms of adversity and positive adaptation including, especially, the presence of normative choices in our attempts to operationalize it, are of considerable significance because they can be directly related to a recent discussion of so called thick concepts. The notion of thick concepts introduced, in writing, by Williams (1985/2006; Kirchin, 2013a, 2013b; Roberts, 2013) can be best understood on the basis of the distinction between *purely descriptive notions* and those which are *evaluatively thin*. The former concepts, including the ones of an oak tree and a laptop discussed above, have only descriptive meaning and their competent usage does not require any normative stance being taken. Thin evaluative notions, on the other hand, are

purely normative: they don't describe the object to which they refer, but rather place it on a particular evaluative scale. The concepts of goodness or rightness are standard examples here. *Thick concepts*, finally, contain both an evaluation and a description, like the notion of courage, which not only refers descriptively to a particular psychological disposition but also places the person who is courageous in good light (in normal contexts we would find it hardly conceivable if somebody said "It is a pity it is such a courageous person").

A crucial point to be made here is that the notion of resilience does share such a twofold nature and is, accordingly, both descriptive and normative. And even if, as such, it is not a problem, some recent discussions on thick concepts can cast some doubts on the idea of separating the former aspect from the latter one and dealing with the descriptive dimension only. So called disentanglement argument (McDowell, 1981; Williams, 1985/2006; Taylor, 1989; Putnam, 2002), more particularly, has been made in order to show that thick concepts are not only both descriptive and normative, but actually *express a union of fact and value* (Williams, 1985/2006, p. 129) in a way which makes it impossible to use them appropriately without a normative perspective being, at least imaginatively, taken. To qualify somebody as a courageous person, for instance, one does need to be able to identify the values involved and to *evaluate* if some of them are *worthy* of risking the others (without such a step we cannot differentiate between courage and recklessness).

At this point a crucial question to pose is whether the notion of resilience is a thick one. And even though the concept in question does not seem to have a well-established folk usage (it is a technical term, after all), some initial points can be made. In the light of the above remarks, more particularly, two options seem to open. At first, one may attempt at the development of a normatively neutral and empirical specification of resilience ignoring its faithfulness to an already established common parlance. In such a case, importantly, the usefulness of a newly coined narrowly empirical notion can be put into question, especially in those contexts in which it is used normatively (i.e. in most of the contexts of its typical application!).

The second option available would be to accept an inevitably normative character of the resilience concept and to search for a methodological perspective, which would do full justice to the union of fact and value which it reflects. The stance defended by Kendler as the one strictly devoted to the fact-value distinction would be obviously incompatible with such a project. Rather, some alternatives inspired by a recent criticism of the Humean dichotomy (Putnam, 2002; cf. Davydova, Sharrock, 2003) would need to be taken into account.

An inspiring example of such an alternative can be found in the work of Svend Brinkmann (2005, 2009) who, importantly, directly addresses the stance offered by Kendler and identifies the most crucial recent arguments against the fact-value distinction. The analyzes in both philosophy and social sciences, more specifically, are discussed as being in favor of: (1) our mental capacity to perceive objective

demands or the "oughtness" immanent to experience (e.g. Gestalt psychology), (2) an inherently normative character of social norms and rules, (3) impossibility of understanding human functioning without values, and, finally, (4) the indispensability of thick concepts for our understanding of human action (rather than mere behavior). Arguments collected by Brinkmann (2009, p. 2; numbers added), in other words, illustrate that „much of what psychologists study, [1] our perception of the world, [2] our ordered social reality, [3] our functions as human beings, and [4] our linguistic practices, could not be what they in fact are, if there had been an unbridgeable gap between facts and values."

If Brinkmann is right, crucially, the presence of thick concepts within our discursive framework turns out to be far from a conceptual and methodological malady. Rather, as it seems, it may be a feature required by the very nature of psychological phenomena studied. A similar, and more specific, perspective has been offered by Elizabeth Anderson (2004, p. 14) who explicitly emphasizes that "the evaluative content of thickly described conceptions of the object of inquiry does not prevent such conceptions from fruitfully and legitimately guiding empirical research." An important distinction which she discusses is the one between scientific *neutrality* conceived as a feature of those theories which neither presuppose, nor support any value judgments, and scientific *impartiality* understood as a situation in which the "only grounds for accepting a theory are its relations to the evidence and its manifestation of cognitive values" (Anderson, 2004, p. 3).

And it is the latter characteristic which she believes to be at the center of most researchers' worries: "Deep down, what the objectors find worrisome about allowing value judgments to guide scientific inquiry is not that they have evaluative content, but that these judgments might be held dogmatically, so as to preclude the recognition of evidence that might undermine them" (Anderson, 2004, p. 11). According to Anderson (2004, p. 22), it was exactly in order to avoid such a dogmatism, such "stubbornness in the face of any conceivable evidence," that many researchers devoted themselves to the fact-value distinction and normative neutrality. She emphasizes, however, that the same purpose could have been achieved within a much more flexible and fertile conceptual framework of an *evaluative inquiry* being an empirical study "devoted to answering evaluative questions" (Anderson, 2004, pp. 22–23). This kind of investigation, importantly, does not have to "end up being rigged simply to reinforce our evaluative preconceptions" as long as the specific functions of value judgments and empirical judgments are kept separate. Providing such a condition is fulfilled, "the active direction of scientific inquiry by value judgments is not only legitimate, but indispensable."

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